

# NATIONAL INTERESTS AS A MECHANISM FOR FORMULATING INTELLIGENCE TASKS

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## Abstract

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of changes in the geopolitical and geo-economic environment resulting from the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and their impact on the transformation of the international security landscape. The essence of national interests is examined as a multidimensional category shaped by historical, political, economic, and civilizational factors, and their role in the development of a geocivilizational strategy of the state is substantiated. Particular attention is paid to the evolution of approaches to the interpretation of national interests within realist and liberal-idealistic paradigms of international relations. Key trends in the formation of a new security architecture are identified under conditions of intensified strategic competition among major global actors, the escalation of hybrid threats, and the acceleration of the technological revolution, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence. The study demonstrates that national interests function as a fundamental mechanism for shaping intelligence tasks, determining priorities, instruments, and directions of intelligence activities in contemporary conditions. The article concludes that the profound transformation of the global security environment necessitates a reassessment of the role of intelligence services in the emerging international order.

**Key words:** geopolitics, security, full-scale invasion, new security architecture, intelligence, artificial intelligence, intelligence activities.

## Introduction

Herbert McMaster, former US National Security Advisor, has described the current situation in the world as follows: "Geopolitics is back, and it is back to exact revenge on us for our disregard of the lessons of history that we demonstrated in the post-Cold War period" (McMaster, H., 2023).

The Russian Federation's (RF) war against Ukraine has precipitated a paradigm shift on a global scale that has no precedent since the conclusion of the Cold War era. A misjudgment of the outcome of the Cold War and an inability to clearly explain the essence of the processes that took place in post-Soviet space in the early 1990s led to a series of wrong political decisions on the part of the West. In lieu of establishing a balanced security framework that would preclude the possibility of a new nuclear confrontation, a decision was taken to "reset" relations with Russia and to integrate it into international structures.

Thus, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine radically changed the perception of the security situation in the world at the global, regional and sub-regional levels. This, in turn, led to fundamental changes in the policies of leading states, as well as the European Union and NATO, and stimulated the strengthening of transatlantic ties.

Under these circumstances, virtually all the special services of NATO member states consider Russia's intelligence and subversive activities to be the main threat to their national security.

Under such conditions, the process of developing reference points for the productive development of the state, which, as global experience shows, becomes national interests, becomes

particularly important.

**Analysis of recent studies and publications.** In global scientific thought and practice, the issue of realising national interests, defining their methodology and political and legal foundations is the subject of research by such scholars as R. Aron, W. Wilson, J. Kennan, H. Morgenthau, R. Niebuhr, J. Rosenau, N. Spykman, and others. At the same time, the influence of national interests on the activities of Intelligence remains understudied.

**The aim** of the study is to examine national interest as a mechanism for shaping intelligence tasks.

## **Results and Discussion**

The concept of national interest, as influenced by the expectations of participants in international relations, is represented through various images and symbols. When interpreted through a system of symbols and images that construct a positive image, national interest emerges as a significant factor in the implementation of state policy. The disclosure of the issue of forming the geopolitical image of the state in its national interests requires clarification of the content of the concept of 'national interests' and detection of trends in its changes.

The concept of "national interest" has only recently entered the domain of scientific discourse; its first appearance in the Oxford Encyclopedia of Social Sciences was in 1935. Contemporary scientific thought has demonstrated a tendency to embrace multidirectional definitions of the category of "national interest", a phenomenon that has given rise to the emergence of diverse scientific schools of thought. In the early 1950s, two paradigms emerged in Western academic circles regarding the practice of using the concept of "national interest": political realism and liberal idealism. Extensive discussions took place between representatives of the 'realist' track-pin retaining cam, founded by H. Morgenthau, and representatives of the 'idealistic' track-pin retaining cam, represented by W. Wilson, on the definition of the essence of national interest. According to the theory of the realistic paradigm, national interest is a product of complex interrelationships between actors in international relations. It is based on the concept of interest formulated in terms of power (Morgenthau Hans J., 1982., 306 p.; Wilson W., 1970, 402 p.).

In contrast to realists, proponents of the liberal-idealistic paradigm argue that national interests are based on moral norms and global issues of our time. H. Morgenthau strongly disagrees with this, noting that "foreign policy guided by universal moral principles and relegating national interests to the background is, in the context of modern politics and military affairs, a policy of national suicide — actual or potential" (Rosenau, J., 1968). Therefore, while liberals focus on the economic well-being of citizens, realists place geopolitical priorities at the forefront of their understanding of national interests.

The concept of national interests has evolved as a result of the historical development of the nation-state as a subject of international law. The concept of "national interest" traditionally comprised of three fundamental elements: military security, economic prosperity and development, and state sovereignty, defined as the exercise of control over a specific territory and population. Concurrently, the substance of these elements may be subject to transformation under the influence of historical, socio-political and economic-geographical factors of the state's functioning. Significant adjustments to the definition of national interest are made by the processes of globalisation. In this context, a globalist approach to the definition of the concept of "national interest" has emerged, thereby calling into question the legitimacy of using this category. Critics of this approach have highlighted the interdependence of states and the emergence of transnational and supranational actors in international relations, which they contend has resulted in a weakening of the role of the nation-state and the replacement of national interests with those of business

interests in the form of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the interests of the international community.

Contemporary global development is characterised by two opposing trends. The first of these trends is driven by the processes of globalisation previously mentioned. The second is driven by the formation of new nations on the ruins of former empires, or the legitimisation of new nations as a result of certain agreements, such as the independent states of the CIS, Kosovo, etc. The category of 'national interest' is fundamental in determining the main directions of their external and domestic policies, and provides contributory support to the definition of their national identity.

In the context of the present conditions of development, the interpretation of "national interest" is not so much ideological as pragmatic in nature and is oriented not so much towards certain national or universal values as towards the ability of the state (its state bodies) to set certain goals and achieve them. Notwithstanding the fact that the objectives of the state, as well as the specific strategies employed to achieve them, may be subject to alteration in the event of the influence of certain socio-political or economic factors, the state authorities responsible for the establishment of these objectives must possess the capacity to formulate and accomplish them. This process necessitates military strength, internal and external stability, economic competitiveness, and so forth. The possession of such capabilities by the state is the reference point for national interests, in its pragmatic interpretation, in determining state policy.

In July 2023, the Director of the CIA, V. Burns, delivered a lecture at the Dechley Foundation in the United Kingdom. Subsequently, in January 2024, he published an article in *The Foreign Affairs*, in which he expounded his strategic vision for the development of major trends in the modern world and in the field of intelligence [5; 6]. In the opinion of V. Burns, the period of unquestionable US dominance is approaching its conclusion. As a result, the Washington administration must rely on cooperation with partners and friendly alliances. The major theatre of war (MTW) partners of the United States in the intelligence sphere are Great Britain and other members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance (a strategic partnership between the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada in the field of intelligence).

In the contemporary world, three key trends have been identified by V. Burns. Firstly, the challenge of strategic competition from a growing and ambitious China and from Russia, which constantly reminds us that a declining power can be at least as destructive as a rising one, must be acknowledged. In the opinion of V. Burns, the most significant long-term threat to the United States is China, which is regarded as the most substantial geopolitical and intelligence-related adversary. In contrast to Russia, China possesses the economic, diplomatic, military and technological capabilities to reshape the global order. In this regard, the US CIA has established a China Mission Centre, whose activities are focused exclusively on the observation of this country and ensuring coordination with all other US intelligence agencies with regard to the PRC. It is evident that the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has increased its expenditure on China by 100% over the past two years. As V. Burns has observed, American intelligence is, on the one hand, enhancing its capabilities to compete with the People's Republic of China (PRC) on a global scale, and, on the other hand, endeavouring to maintain communication with China in order to avoid dangerous misunderstandings and accidental incidents.

Burns stressed that the problem is not China's rise as such, but the actions that accompany it. President Xi is beginning his third term with more power than any Chinese leader since Mao. And instead of using that power to strengthen, revitalise and renew the international system that made China's transformation possible, he is seeking to rewrite it.

He also stressed that the most immediate and acute geopolitical challenge to the international order today is Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Although, as Mr. Burns noted, Russian

aggression is a difficult test, the only country that intends to change the international order is China, and, moreover, has the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do so.

Burns V. believes that Putin's war has been a strategic failure for Russia its military vulnerabilities have become apparent; its economy has been devastated; its future is as China's "junior partner" and "economic colony"; its revanchist ambitions have been rebuffed by the North Atlantic Alliance, which has grown in size and become even stronger.

Second, there are stateless problems, such as the climate crisis and global pandemics, which are beyond the reach of any single country and are becoming increasingly existential.

COVID has shown every government the danger of being dependent on a single country for vital medical supplies, just as Putin's aggression in Ukraine has clearly shown every government the risks of being dependent on a single country for energy sourcing. In today's world, no country wants to be at the mercy of a cartel for an important mineral or technology, especially a country that has demonstrated the will and ability to deepen that dependence and use it as a weapon. The answer to this question is not to disconnect from an economy like China's, which would be foolish, but to intelligently reduce risks and diversify by ensuring resilient supply chains, protecting our technological advantage, and investing in industrial capacity.

And thirdly, it is a technological revolution that is changing the way we live, work, fight and compete, with opportunities and risks that we cannot yet fully understand.

In this regard, V. Burns emphasises that progress in computer-related technologies – from chips to quantum and artificial intelligence – is leading to crack-throughs of extraordinary scale and scope. In just a few months since the first public release of ChatGPT in November last year, we have seen newer models outperform humans on entrance exams to graduate school and in evaluation of doctor-patient interaction in medical training programmes.

Leadership in technology and innovation has been the foundation of our economic prosperity and military strength. It has also been critical to establishing rules, norms, and standards that protect our interests and our values. Our Chinese rivals understand this as well as anyone else, and so it is no surprise that they are investing heavily in cutting-edge technologies as a central dimension of our strategic competition.

It is telling that the U.S. intelligence community's annual report on global threats to national security (Annual threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community. March 2025) states: "Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea — individually and collectively — challenge U.S. interests around the world, by attacking or threatening others in their regions, using both asymmetric and traditional tactics of hard power, and promoting alternative systems to compete with the United States, primarily in the areas of trade, finance, and security. They seek to challenge the United States and other countries through targeted campaigns to gain advantage while avoiding direct war. The growing cooperation between these adversaries strengthens their resilience against the United States, increases the capability for reinforcement for military action with one of them that could draw in the other, and puts pressure on other global players to take sides..." (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2025).

In addition, the above-mentioned report emphasises that the PRC is likely to continue to position itself as the country with the upper hand in a potential conflict with MultiCam. The PRC will continue to pressure Taiwan to reunify and will continue to conduct large-scale cyber operations against American targets for both espionage and strategic advantage. China is likely to attempt to sufficiently restrict the activities of Chinese companies and criminal elements that supply and illegally traffic fentanyl precursors and synthetic opioids to the United States, unless more aggressive measures are taken by law enforcement agencies.

Beijing will continue to strengthen its conventional military capability for reinforcement and strategic forces, intensify competition in space, and maintain its industrial and technology-intensive economic strategy to compete with US economic power and global leadership.

China poses the most substantial and influential military threat to the national security of the Lienie MultiCam. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is developing combined forces capable of full-spectrum warfare. This is in order to counter US intervention in regional conflicts, extend its power globally, and defend what Beijing considers its sovereign territory. A significant proportion of China's military modernisation endeavours is dedicated to the development of counter-intervention mechanisms that are customised to encompass all dimensions of US and allied military operations within the Pacific region. The capital city of China has set itself the ambitious target of achieving key modernisation milestones by 2027 and 2035, with the aim of transforming the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into a world-class military by 2049.

Of particular note is that China is using an aggressive whole-of-government approach, combined with state control of the private sector, to become a global scientific and technological superpower, surpass the US, provide contributory support for self-sufficiency, and achieve further economic, political, and military advantages. Beijing has prioritised technology sectors such as advanced energy, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, quantum computing and semiconductors, challenging efforts to protect critical technologies by tailoring restrictions narrowly to address homeland security concerns. China is accelerating its scientific and technological progress through a range of legal and illegal tools, including investment, acquisition and theft of intellectual property, cyber operations, talent recruitment, international cooperation and sanction evasion.

In turn, on 19 March 2025, the European Commission presented the "White Paper on European Defense – Readiness 2030" (European Commission, 2025).

The international order is changing. A new one will emerge in the second half of this decade. Europe must actively participate in these processes to avoid the danger of becoming a "passive recipient" of the consequences of the new order, including the prospect of full-scale war. The challenges to European security are strategic in nature and require a strategic response. The traditional spectrum of different types of security threats is rapidly expanding, and the interconnections between them are intensifying, as evidenced by repeated cases of terrorism and violent extremism, hybrid attacks, and the actions of international organised crime groups and cybercriminal networks. There is evidence of links between criminal groups and hostile state actors, which can easily cross borders thanks to new technologies. Due to their geographical proximity, European states are constantly confronted with migration caused by the effects of war and climate change in North Africa and the Middle East. The Arctic is becoming a new arena for geopolitical competition in the north of the continent.

Russia poses a significant strategic threat, forcing Europe and its partners to confront the reality of intense, large-scale mechanised warfare on the European continent, a scenario last observed 80 years ago. The Russian Federation, the most heavily armed European state, is developing a military economy with the objective of achieving its military goals through industrial mobilisation and technological innovation. Furthermore, it is expanding its military economy with the support of Belarus, North Korea and Iran. The Russian Federation has declared its ongoing state of war with the West. Should the objectives of the Russian Federation be realised in Ukraine, it is likely that its territorial ambitions will extend beyond the borders of the country.

Hybrid threats are intensifying, such as cyberattacks, sabotage (particularly in the Baltic and Black Seas), electronic interference in the global navigational and satellite systems, disinformation campaigns, political and industrial espionage, and the use of migration as a weapon. Geopolitical rivalry has not only led to a new phase in the arms race, but has also triggered a global technology race. Technology will become a major theater of war (MTW of competition in the new geopolitical

environment. A number of critical and enabling technologies (artificial intelligence, bio- and quantum technologies, robotics, hypersonic technologies) are key components of both long-term economic growth and military advantage.

In light of the fundamental shifts in the strategic environment, it is imperative for Europe to develop a sufficient capability for reinforcement to deter potential aggression. The EU acknowledges the responsibility of Member States for their own armed forces, encompassing all aspects from doctrine development to deployment characteristics and requirements. The European Union has a considerable capacity for reinforcement, which can support and coordinate efforts to strengthen the defence industrial base and overall defence readiness of the European Union by:

- contributory support for closer cooperation and effective scaling of the European defence industry in the development, production and promotion of weapon systems;

- improving the effectiveness, interchangeability and interoperability of under arms, reducing outlays by avoiding competitive procurement and improving the purchasing power of Member States, as well as ensuring stability and predictability through long-term industrial orders;

- supporting dual-use infrastructure for mobility, space communications, navigation and observation;

- contributory support for various forms of partnership.

## **Conclusions**

The concept of national interests is a multifaceted system encompassing the vital needs of the state and society, as well as the cultural and spiritual values inherent in the populace. The purpose of national interests is to ensure the well-being of the state and to minimise (or eliminate) threats to its security.

The concept of national interests is multifaceted in nature, encompassing both external (international) and internal (domestic) dimensions. These interests serve as the foundational basis for the formulation of state policy in the long term. The study indicates that national interest functions as a pivotal mechanism in the delineation of intelligence agency objectives. It can be posited that strategic competition, common transnational imperatives, and a technological revolution that is unparalleled in the annals of human history collectively engender an exceedingly intricate international landscape. This focus necessitates a re-evaluation of the role of intelligence in this rapidly evolving world.

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## **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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